

AWARENESS
— AND —
PURIFICATION

Acts of the Meeting
for the Protection of
Minors in the Church

[VATICAN CITY, FEBRUARY 21-24, 2019]



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INTRODUCTION

The Courage to Give a Name to the Evil of Abuse

|| **ANDREA TORNIELLI**, *Editorial Director of
the Dicastery for Communication of the Holy See*

“Behind this is Satan.” As he spoke at the end of the Mass celebrated in the Sala Regia with the 190 participants of the Meeting for the Protection of Minors in the Church, Pope Francis offered this eloquent sentence. The pope spoke boldly and realistically of a vile phenomenon. “In these painful cases,” he said, “I see the hand of evil that does not spare even the innocence of the little ones. And this leads me to think of the example of Herod who, driven by fear of losing his power, ordered the slaughter of all the children of Bethlehem.” Previously, during an interview with journalists on an airplane, Francis had compared the abuse to “a black mass.” So “behind this is Satan,” the hand of evil.

Recognizing this does not mean forgetting all explanations or diminishing the personal responsibilities of institutions, individuals, or groups. It does not mean closing one’s eyes to the need for increasingly safe and transparent protocols and laws, for acting against abusers, or for secure environments. It means situating all this in a deeper context, understanding its true origin.

For four days, February 21-24, 2019, bishops from all over the world representing the entire world episcopate, together with representatives of the superiors of male and female religious orders and some lay people, met with Peter to become more aware of the tragedy of victims of abuse and to work together on responsibility, accountability, and transparency.

In his concluding address, the pope spoke of abuses not only in the Church, but also in the world. He did this to manifest the concern of a father and pastor, not to minimize the seriousness of the abuses perpetrated in the ecclesial context, because, he said, “the brutality of this world-

wide phenomenon becomes all the more grave and scandalous in the Church.” Parents who had entrusted their children to priests, to introduce them to the life of faith, saw them return irreparably and permanently wounded in body and soul. In the justified anger of these people, the pope said, “the Church sees the reflection of the wrath of God, betrayed and insulted by these deceitful consecrated persons.”

The silent cry of the abused, the incurable tragedy of their lives destroyed by the consecrated men turned into corrupt and insensitive orcs, resounded loudly in the synod hall in those days of late February. It pierced the hearts of bishops and religious superiors. It swept away justifications and helped to put legal and technical aspects in the proper perspective. The universal Church became aware of the absolute gravity of the phenomenon as never before, because the representatives of the entire world episcopate had never met to discuss this topic. Nor has the voice of survivors ever sounded so dramatically and repeatedly, as happened in the synod hall in those days, with their testimonies included in the context of evening prayer at the end of each day.

Pope Francis, concluding the meeting, thanked the many priests and religious who spend themselves to proclaim the Gospel and to educate and protect the little ones and the helpless by giving their lives in the following of Jesus. Looking into the abyss of evil can never make us forget the good, not out of useless pride but because one needs to know where to look and who to follow as an example.

But the meeting in the Vatican, which one can follow day by day through these pages, was not just a punch to the gut that made the participants more conscious of the devastating action of evil and sin and therefore of the need to ask forgiveness by invoking the help of divine grace. The summit also attested to the firm intention to give substance to what emerged with effective operational action, because the awareness of the gravity of sin and the constant appeal to heaven for help, which characterized the meeting at the Vatican, go hand in hand with a renewed operational commitment to ensure that ecclesial environments will become always safer for minors and vulnerable adults, in the hope that this commitment can also spread to all other sectors of our societies.

FEBRUARY 21, 2019

Responsibility

OPENING REMARKS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Dear Brothers, good morning!

In light of the scourge of sexual abuse perpetrated by ecclesiastics to the great harm of minors, I wanted to consult you, Patriarchs, Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, and Religious Superiors and Leaders, so that together we might listen to the Holy Spirit and, in docility to his guidance, hear the cry of the little ones who plead for justice. In this meeting, we sense the weight of the pastoral and ecclesial responsibility that obliges us to discuss together, in a synodal, frank, and in-depth manner, how to confront this evil afflicting the Church and humanity. The holy People of God looks to us, and expects from us not simple and predictable condemnations, but concrete and effective measures to be undertaken. We need to be concrete.

So we begin this process armed with faith and a spirit of great *parrhesia*, courage, and concreteness.

As a help, I would share with you some important criteria formulated by the various Episcopal Commissions and Conferences—they came from you and I have organized them somewhat. They are guidelines to assist in our reflection, and they will now be distributed to you. They are a simple point of departure that came from you and now return to you. They are not meant to detract from the creativity needed in this meeting.

In your name, I would also like to thank the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the members of the Organizing Committee for their outstanding and dedicated work in preparing for this meeting. Many thanks!

Finally, I ask the Holy Spirit to sustain us throughout these days, and to help us to turn this evil into an opportunity for awareness and purification. May the Virgin Mary enlighten us as we seek to heal the grave wounds that the scandal of pedophilia has caused, both in the little ones and in believers.

Thank you.

TESTIMONIALS
OF VICTIMS OF
SEXUAL ABUSE

FIRST TESTIMONY

First of all, I want to thank the Commission for allowing me to address you today and the Holy Father for all the support and help he has given us in recent times. They asked me to talk about the pain that comes from sexual abuse. Everyone knows that sexual abuse leaves tremendous consequences for everyone. I therefore believe that it is not worthwhile to continue to talk about this because the consequences are evident in all aspects, and they persist for the rest of one's life.

Instead I would like to speak about myself as a Catholic, about what happened to me, and about what I would like to say to the bishops. For a Catholic, the most difficult thing is to be able to speak about sexual abuse; but once you have taken courage and begun telling—in our case, I speak of myself—the first thing I thought was: I'm going to tell everything to Holy Mother Church, where they will listen to me and respect me. The first thing they did was to treat me as a liar, turn their backs and tell me that I, and others, were enemies of the Church. This pattern exists not only in Chile: it exists all over the world, and this must end.

I know that there has been talk about how to end this phenomenon, how to prevent it from happening again, and how to eliminate this evil. First of all: false forgiveness, forced forgiveness does not work. Victims need to be believed, respected, cared for, and healed. You need to repair what has been done to the victims, be close to them, believe them, and accompany them. You are the physicians of the soul and yet, with rare exceptions, you have been transformed—in some cases—into murderers of the soul, into murderers of the faith. What a terrible contradiction. I wonder: What does Jesus think? What does Mary think, when she sees that it is her own shepherds who betray their own little sheep? I ask you, please collaborate with justice, because you have a special care for the victims, so that what is happening in Chile, that is, what the pope is doing in Chile, may be repeated as a model in other countries of the world.

We see the tip of the iceberg every day: although the Church says it's all over, cases continue to emerge. Why? Because it proceeds like when

you are diagnosed with a tumor: you must treat the whole cancer, not just remove the tumor, so you need chemotherapy, radiotherapy, you need to have some treatment. It is not enough to remove the tumor and that's it. I ask you to listen to what the Holy Father wants to do, not limiting yourself to nodding your head and then doing something else. The only thing I ask of you—and I ask the Holy Spirit—is to help restore that trust in the Church, that those who do not want to listen to the Holy Spirit and who want to continue to cover-up leave the Church in order to make way for those who want to create a new Church, a renewed Church, and a Church absolutely free from sexual abuse. I entrust all this to the Virgin, to the Lord, that all this may become a reality. We cannot continue with this crime of covering the scourge of sexual abuse in the Church. I hope that the Lord and Mary will enlighten you and that, once and for all, we work with justice to remove this cancer from the Church, because it is destroying it. And this is what the devil wants. Thank you.

SECOND TESTIMONY

Q. What hurt you most in life?

R. From the age of fifteen I had sexual relations with a priest. This lasted for thirteen years. I got pregnant three times and he made me have an abortion three times, quite simply because he did not want to use condoms or contraceptives. At first I trusted him so much that I did not know he could abuse me. I was afraid of him, and every time I refused to have sex with him, he would beat me. And since I was completely dependent on him economically, I suffered all the humiliations he inflicted on me. We had these relations both in his home in the village and in the diocesan reception center. In this relationship I did not have the right to have “boyfriends”; whenever I had one and he came to know about it, he would beat me up. That was the condition for helping me economically. He gave me everything I wanted, when I accepted to have sex; otherwise he would beat me.

Q. How did you deal with these wounds and how do you feel now?

R. I feel I have a life destroyed. I have suffered so many humiliations in this relationship that I do not know what the future holds for me.... This made me very cautious in my relationships, now.

Q. What message do you want to pass to the bishops?

R. It must be said that to love, essentially is to love freely: when a person loves someone you think of their future, of their good. You cannot abuse a person this way. It must be said that priests and religious are able to help and at the same time to destroy: they have to behave like leaders, like wise people.

Q. Thank you very much. Your contribution will be very significant for the bishops' Meeting. Once again, thank you.

PRESENTATIONS

THE SMELL OF THE SHEEP

*Knowing Their Pain and Healing Their Wounds
Is at the Core of the Shepherd's Task*

|| CARDINAL LUIS ANTONIO G. TAGLE, *Archbishop of Manila,*
|| *President of Caritas International*

The abuse of minors by ordained ministers has inflicted wounds not only on the victims, but also on their families, the clergy, the Church, the wider society, the perpetrators themselves, and the bishops. But it is also true, we humbly and sorrowfully admit, that wounds have been inflicted by us bishops on the victims and in fact the entire body of Christ. Our lack of response to the suffering of victims, even to the point of rejecting them and covering up the scandal to protect perpetrators and the institution has injured our people, leaving a deep wound in our relationship with those we are sent to serve. People are rightly asking, “Have you, who are called to have the smell of the sheep upon you, not instead run away when you found the stench of the filth inflicted on children and vulnerable people you were supposed to protect, too strong to endure?” Wounds call for healing. But what does healing consist in? How do we as bishops, who have been part of the wounding, now promote healing in this specific context? The theme of healing of wounds has been the subject of many inter-disciplinary studies. And I cannot pretend to know all the findings of the human and social sciences on the subject, but I believe we need to recover and maintain a faith and ecclesial perspective to guide us. I repeat: a faith and ecclesial perspective to guide us, as stressed many times by Pope Francis. For my presentation, especially the first part, I invite everyone to look to the Risen Lord and learn from him, his disciples, and their encounter.¹

1 I want to acknowledge at this point the studies published by Roberto Goizueta, Richard Horsley, Barbara Reid, Tomas Halik, Robert Enright, and Cardinal Albert Vanhoye, to name a few authors, who have helped me in my reflection.

The apparition of the Risen Lord to the disciples and to Thomas (John 20:19–28)

St. John's Gospel narrates an apparition of the Risen Lord to the disciples on the evening of the first day of the week. The doors were locked as the disciples cowered in fear, wondering if they would be the next to be arrested and crucified. It is in this moment of utter helplessness that the risen and yet still wounded Jesus stands in their midst. After greeting them with the message of the resurrection, "Peace be with you," he showed them his hands and his side, marked by gaping wounds. Only by drawing close to his wounds could they be sent on a mission of reconciliation and forgiveness by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thomas was not with them at that time. Let us now hear the account of the encounter between the Risen Lord and Thomas.

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So, the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Now a week later his disciples were again inside the room and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Those sent must be in touch with wounded humanity

Notice how Jesus invites them again to look at his wounds. He even insists that Thomas put his finger into the wounds of his hands and to bring his hand into the wound of his side. Try to imagine how Thomas must have felt. But from seeing the wounds of the Risen Lord, he makes the supreme profession of faith in Jesus as Lord and God. Seeing and touching the wounds of Jesus are fundamental to the act and confession of faith. What can we learn from this intimate encounter? By repeating this action twice,

the evangelist makes clear that those who are sent to proclaim the core of our Christian faith, the dying and rising of Christ, can only do so with authenticity if they are constantly in touch with the wounds of humanity. That is one of the marks of our ministry. This is true of Thomas, and it is true of the Church of all time, especially in our time. Msgr. Tomas Halik writes, “Christ comes to him, to Thomas, and shows him His wounds. This means that the resurrection is not the ‘effacement’ or devaluation of the cross. Wounds remain wounds.” The wounds of Christ remain in the wounds of our world. And Msgr. Halik adds, “Our world is full of wounds. It is my conviction that those who close their eyes to the wounds in our world have no right to say, ‘My Lord and my God.’” For him, seeing and touching the wounds of Christ in the wounds of humanity is a condition for authentic faith. He further says, “I cannot believe until I touch the wounds, the suffering of the world—for all the painful wounds, all the misery of the world and of humankind are Christ’s wounds! I do not have the right to confess God unless I take seriously my neighbor’s pain. Faith that would like to close its eyes to people’s suffering is just an illusion.” Faith is born and reborn only from the wounds of the Crucified and Risen Christ seen and touched in the wounds of humankind. Only a wounded faith is credible (Halik). How can we profess faith in Christ when we close our eyes to all the wounds inflicted by abuse?

What is at stake

Brothers and sisters, this is what is at stake at this moment of crisis brought about by the abuse of children and our poor handling of these crimes. Our people need us to draw close to their wounds and acknowledge our faults if we are to give authentic and credible witness to our faith in the Resurrection. This means that each of us and our brothers and sisters at home must take personal responsibility for bringing healing to this wound in the body of Christ and make the commitment to do everything in our power and capacity to see that children are safe, are cared for in our communities.

The presence of the wounds of the crucifixion on the Risen Lord, for me, defies human logic. If the world were in charge of choreographing

the resurrection, Jesus would have showed up at Herod's house or Pilate's porch and made it the biggest "I told you so" in history. Jesus would have manifested his final triumph by eliminating all signs of pain, injustice, and defeat. Let all of them be buried in the dark past and never be resurrected. But that is not the way of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is not an illusionary victory. By showing his wounds to the disciples, Jesus restores their memory. Roberto Goizueta justly comments that "the wounds on Christ's glorified body are the incarnated memory of the relationships that defined his life and death." The wounds of Jesus are the consequence of his loving and compassionate relationship with the poor, the sick, tax collectors, women of ill repute, persons afflicted with leprosy, noisy children, outsiders, and foreigners. The wounds of Jesus are the consequence of his allowing himself to be wounded as he touched the wounds of others. He was crucified because he loved these concrete persons who were themselves wounded by society and religion. By sharing in their weakness and wounds, he became a compassionate brother rather than a harsh judge. So the letter to the Hebrews 5:8-9 affirms, "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered, and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." So the wounds of the Risen Lord remind the disciples of the love that is ready to be wounded out of compassion for humankind. His wounds are the wounds of others that he freely bore. He did not inflict wounds on others, but he was ready to be wounded by his love for and communion with them. As Frederick Gaiser said, "The healing shepherd is never far from dangers, never impervious to the evils and infirmities from which he seeks to protect the flock." Only the wounds of love and compassion can heal.

Do not be afraid

My dear brothers and sisters, we need to put aside any hesitation to draw close to the wounds of our people out of fear of being wounded ourselves. Yes, much of the wounds we will suffer are part of the restoration of memory we must undergo, as did those disciples of Jesus. The wounds of the Risen Lord reminded the disciples of betrayal, their own betrayal and

abandonment of Jesus when they saved their own lives out of fear. They fled at the first moment of danger, afraid of the cost of discipleship, and in Peter's case, even denying that he even knew the Lord. Jesus' wounds also remind them and us that wounds are often inflicted by blindness of ambition and legalism and misuse of power that condemned an innocent person to die as a criminal. The wounds of the Risen Christ carry the memory of innocent suffering, but they also carry the memory of our weakness and sinfulness.

If we want to be agents of healing, let us reject any tendency that is part of worldly thinking that refuses to see and touch the wounds of others, which are Christ's wounds in the wounded people. Those wounded by abuse and the scandal need us to be strong in faith in this moment. The world needs authentic witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus who draw close to his wounds as the first act of faith. I will be stressing: this is an act of faith.

Roberto Goizueta claims that the denial of wounds and death leads to the death of others and to our own death. There is great fear today in the hearts of people, and indeed in our own hearts, that cause humanity in our time to shun touching the wounds in our world simply because we are afraid of facing our own wounds, our own mortality, weakness, sinfulness, and vulnerability. Ernest Becker observes that we avoid pain and suffering as unwanted reminders that we are vulnerable. We are fooled into believing that having much money, the right insurance policy, the strictest security, closed circuit television cameras, the latest models of cars and gadgets, and membership in rejuvenating health clubs could make us immortal. Sadly, we do also eliminate the wounded in our midst by getting them out of the streets when dignitaries visit or by covering their shanties with painted walls. Goizueta poignantly says, "If we deny death, we inflict it. If we deny death, we will inflict death. But we also inflict it on ourselves. The fear of pain and vulnerability that causes us to shun real human relationships, to shun that true love that always involves surrender and vulnerability in the face of another, ultimately kills our—our!—interior life, our ability to feel anything—neither pain nor joy, nor love." Our capacity to love might die. The fear of wounds isolates us and makes us indifferent to the needs of others. Fear drives people to violent and irratio-

nal behavior. Fear motivates people to defend themselves even when no threats exist. Those who sow fear in others and society are actually afraid of themselves. In the Risen Jesus we know that by seeing and touching the wounds of those who suffer, we touch our own wounds and we touch Jesus. We become brothers and sisters to one another. We acknowledge our common guilt in inflicting wounds on humankind and creation. We hear the call to reconciliation. We see the patient presence of the Risen Lord in our broken world.

Continual accompaniment in solidarity

The second and last part of my sharing consists in a psychologist's proposal on how to address the crisis in the light of faith. For this portion I will rely heavily on Dr. Robert Enright, professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the United States and the pioneer in the social scientific study of forgiveness. We are collaborating with him on the program of forgiveness in the Philippines. In fact, in this very moment there is a session among Catholic school educators in Manila on "Pain, Wound and Forgiveness." According to Dr. Enright, one concern that we must address is: Once justice is served, how do we help the victims to heal from the effects of the abuse? Justice is necessary, but by itself does not heal the broken human heart. If we are to serve the victims and all those wounded by the crisis, we need to take seriously their wound of resentment and pain and the need for healing. Resentment can be like a disease that slowly and steadily infects people, until their enthusiasm and energy are gone. With increasing stress, they are prone to heightened anxiety and depression, lowered self-images, and interpersonal conflicts that arise from the inner brokenness. Yet before we even raise the issue of asking the victims to forgive as part of their healing, we must clarify that we are not suggesting that they should just let it all go, excuse the abuse, just move on. No. Far from it. Without question, we know that when victims come to a moment of forgiving others who have harmed them, a deeper healing takes place and the understandable resentments that build up in their hearts are reconciled. We know that forgiveness is one powerful and even

scientifically supported pathway for eliminating pain and resentment in the human heart. We as the Church should continue to walk with those profoundly wounded by abuse, building trust, providing unconditional love, and repeatedly asking for forgiveness in the full recognition that we do not deserve that forgiveness in the order of justice but can only receive it when it is bestowed as gift and grace in the process of healing.

Finally, we are concerned that in some cases bishops and religious superiors are tempted—perhaps even at times pressured—to choose between victim and perpetrator. Who should we be helping? Who should be helped? Now, a focus on justice and forgiveness shows us the answer: We focus on both. Regarding victims, we need to help them to express their deep hurts and to heal from them. Regarding the perpetrators, we need to serve justice, help them to face the truth without rationalization, and at the same time not neglect their inner world, their own wounds.

At times, we are tempted to think in “either/or” terms: We strive either for justice or we try to offer forgiveness. We need a shift to a “both/and” stance as we deliberately ask these questions: How can we serve justice and foster forgiveness in the face of this wound of sexual abuse? How can we prevent distorting forgiveness so that we do not equate it with just letting the injustice slide away or move on and dismiss the wrong? How can we keep an accurate view of forgiveness as offering a startling mercy of unconditional love to those who have done wrong, while at the same time, we strive for justice? How can we renew the Church by a firm correction of a definite wrong and walk with the abused, patiently and repeatedly begging forgiveness, knowing that giving such a gift can heal them even more?

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to read a portion from Pope Francis’s “Letter to the Pilgrim People of God in Chile” (May 31, 2018): “Without this vision of faith, anything we could say or do would fail. This certainty is essential to look at the present without evasiveness but with audacity, with courage but wisely, with tenacity but without violence, with pas-

sion but without fanaticism, with constancy but without anxiety, and so to change everything that today can put at risk the integrity and dignity of each person. Indeed, the solutions we need require that problems be tackled without getting caught up in it or, worse still, repeating the same mechanisms they want to eliminate” (n. 2).

Learning from the Risen Lord and his disciples, we look at and touch the wounds of victims, families, guilty and innocent clergy, the Church, and society. Beholding Jesus wounded by betrayal and abuse of power, we see the wounds of those hurt by those who should have protected them. In Jesus we experience the mercy that preserves justice and celebrates the gift of forgiveness. The Church hopefully would be a community of justice coming from communion and compassion, a Church eager to go forth on a mission of reconciliation to the wounded world in the Holy Spirit. Once again, the Crucified and Risen Lord stands in our midst at this moment, shows us his wounds and proclaims, “Peace be with you!” May we ever grow in our faith in this great mystery. Thank you.